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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN NEW YORK 000662

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2013  
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SUBJECT: FRIENDS GROUP EXPRESSES BROAD SUPPORT FOR UN'S  
ROLE IN BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hosted a meeting of the Friends of Burma on July 23, in advance of a July 24 briefing on Burma in the Security Council, and in advance of Special Envoy Gambari's planned mid-August visit to Burma. The SYG urged broad support for Gambari's mission as a way to "increase (Gambari's) negotiating capacity." Gambari outlined four themes for his visit: 1) resumption of dialogue, preferably at a high level, between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi; 2) preparations for upcoming elections; 3) regularization of the UN good offices role, including the placing of UN staff in Rangoon; and 4) economic and social fora focusing on reconstruction. Members of the Friends group voiced broad support for the UN role. The U.S., France, UK and others urged Gambari to press for the release of all political prisoners, while others, including China, Russia and India, supported Gambari's visit but disagreed with pressing Burmese authorities. End summary.

¶2. (C) The SYG opened by saying that the Friends of Burma was meeting for the fourth time, and he found the format very useful. He said he was open to visiting Burma in the future to continue the "good offices" role, although the immediate focus was Special Envoy Gambari's mid-August visit. He said the UN's role should be regularized, and Gambari's visits should not be subject each time to "diplomatic negotiations." The SYG said the UN is committed to a "richer, deeper" dialogue with Burmese authorities, and said he had clearly called on them to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. After requests from some members, the SYG said he would release a press statement about the meeting, reiterating these themes.

¶3. (C) Gambari said that the UN has been careful to keep the humanitarian and political tracks separate, and he noted that U/SYG for Humanitarian Affairs Holmes was visiting Burma. In advance of his mid-August visit, Gambari said he has been coordinating closely with the Burmese authorities, including the Burmese Ambassador to the UN. The four themes of his visit are: 1) the resumption of dialogue between ASSK and the government, preferably at a high level; 2) preparations for general elections; 3) regularization of the UN's good offices role, to include the placement of Gambari's staff in Burma; and 4) broad-based economic and social fora that begin discussions on reconstruction.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad agreed with Gambari's broad themes and said attention must now be paid to the political track. He noted two ways to sharpen Gambari's focus: 1) any negotiation with Burmese authorities must be time-bound and include specific benchmarks, and 2) Gambari should send a clear message regarding the release of political prisoners. Dialogue between ASSK and the authorities must occur at a high level. Singapore and France agreed with Gambari's themes and with this further sharpening of the themes as described by Ambassador Khalilzad. Singapore also emphasized the role of ASEAN and thanked the SYG for his clear statement

in support of ASEAN.

15. (C) The Chinese representative supported Gambari's mission, and said it was important to look at the progress made and the cumulative positive effect of the good offices role. He said Burma's problems could only be solved by the people and government of Burma, and said the good offices role is the best solution for the international community. The UK supported Ambassador Khalilzad's statements, and pushed back on the Chinese representative's optimistic summation of the situation. He said the last six months have been a step backward.

16. (C) India supported Gambari as well, but urged that the issue of political prisoners be "nuanced" - i.e., Gambari should use his judgment whether his visit is an appropriate time to push for the release of all political prisoners. He said the UN good offices roles should remain in the lead, and said other initiatives, including the informal focus group (made up of India, China, Indonesia and Burma) had roles to play in support of the UN lead. Indonesia reiterated China's theme of incremental progress, and reiterated that the informal focus group is in support of the UN's good offices role. Russia spoke last and said that the environment for contacts with the Burmese authorities is very good. Gambari's four themes were reasonable. Russia hoped that the process would continue as a dialogue. Any benchmarks or timetable must come from this dialogue, and cannot be imposed.

Khalilzad